

# **FIGHTING STYLES: THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF APPLYING CONTEMPORARY RHETORICAL THEORY TO THE PERSUASIVE PROSE OF MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT AND MARY HAYS**

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## **I. WOLLSTONECRAFT AND HAYS: THE NEED FOR A STYLE-CENTERED READING AND A PROPOSED METHODOLOGY**

For centuries, Mary Wollstonecraft was stigmatized and her pupil Mary Hays was largely overlooked. Even though reformers borrowed directly and abundantly from her ideas from the moment they appeared, nearly a hundred years passed from the publication of Wollstonecraft's works until it became common to cite her as an authority. Of Hays' place in history, M. Ray Adams says, "Soon after the time of the French Revolution she became enveloped in an obscurity which has never lifted" (Adams, 1940, p. 472). Writing in 1940, Adams could hardly have guessed the robust return both authors would make to the public consciousness. The past thirty years have seen exponential growth in the amount of scholarship on both authors; Wollstonecraft's work alone has been the subject of over 500 journal articles in the past twelve years. Although Hays' writings may not be experiencing the same crescendo of scholarly attention, she is now a fixture, along with her mentor, in at least three academic disciplines. Literature studies, communication studies, and women's studies all find rich and rewarding material in the fiction and creative non-fiction of both pioneering authors.

The relationship between Wollstonecraft and Hays has also sparked immense interest. Much biographical scholarship has addressed Wollstonecraft's mentoring of Hays and the subsequent advocatory role Hays would go on to

play for her mentor. Consequently, scholars such as Katharine M. Rogers have undertaken comparisons of their work. Although their novels *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* and *The Victim of Prejudice* are frequently compared works, a large and growing body of criticism exists on each author's primary work of persuasive non-fiction, Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Hays' *An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women*. Such criticism tends to compare the works' remarkably similar ideologies. I concede the existence of significant similarities in their ideologies, but I seek to augment current assessments of *Vindication* and *Appeal* by drawing attention to the vastly different writing styles the two works utilize. Very little work to this effect has yet been done. Miriam Brody has lucidly examined the social ramifications of Wollstonecraft's stylistic choices, but scholarship that compares the two authors' styles as a means of refining our conclusions about their ideologies is still a pioneering endeavor.

The absence of a comparative stylistic analysis is more remarkable given that in the past forty years, style has become a major topic in rhetorical theory. Especially in composition studies, renewed debates about writing style have resulted in the overturning of ideas championed since the time of Aristotle. Once thought a superficial matter of presentation, style is now largely considered a politically potent, ideologically substantive feature of any carefully crafted text. From this perspective, differences in style between these two early feminists become very important. Since Wollstonecraft and Hays are back in the spotlight and likely to remain, it is both inevitable and beneficial that their centuries-old writings will be re-examined and assessed against the canons of contemporary rhetoric. The stylistic re-assessment I undertake in this chapter will evidence the value of the current emphasis on style by exemplifying the sorts of discoveries this emphasis makes available. But more specifically, I want the method of discovery to evidence my assertions about needed adjustments in the pedagogy of writing style in college courses.

In terms of contemporary scholarship, the leading work comparing the form and content of *A Vindication* and *An Appeal* is Katharine M. Roger's 1987 article "The Contribution of Mary Hays." Rogers overviews the structures, strategies, and styles of both authors' main works of persuasive prose with occasional reference to their fiction for additional examples of their argumentative techniques. Rogers' purpose is two-fold. First, as the title of her article implies, she wants to ensure that Hays not be "dismissed as a lesser Wollstonecraft" but is instead recognized as an important feminist rhetorician in her own right (Rogers, 1987, p. 131). Second, she contends that Hays' approach to argumentation not only differs but also complements Wollstonecraft's. Whereas Wollstonecraft critiques institutions and social systems, seeking to overturn

injustice on a macroscopic level, Hays focuses on domestic and relational concerns. Wollstonecraft, Rogers notes, operates in the realm of the abstract. Wollstonecraft hopes that if virtue can be defined similarly for both genders, life will improve for men and women alike (Rogers, 1987, pp. 131-132). Hays, though, consistently favors a pragmatic and specific approach. She concerns herself with “how oppressively the double standard actually operates in married life” (Rogers, 1987, p. 133). Rogers laments that specificity and pragmatism did not remain flagship concerns in Hays’ fiction, where Hays instead tended toward sentimentalism and “a stupefyingly stilted style” (Rogers, 1987, p. 140). Rogers concludes her comparative investigation succinctly:

Hays’s feminist works, then, complement the *Vindication*. She fleshes out Wollstonecraft’s analysis with examples from daily life and lowers her rhetoric to a familiar no-nonsense tone. Together the two authors make the points that need to be made on the theoretical and domestic level. (Rogers, 1987, p. 139)

Rogers makes a compelling case. She shows that Hays’ techniques, which might appear overly simplistic to a modern reader, were the result of an adept awareness of her audience. Rogers also rightly credits Hays for having a sense of which arguments to simply dismiss, as she does with the essentialist pronouncements found in the conduct literature of her time (Rogers, 1987, p. 135).

However, there are several challenges I would like to pose to Rogers’ conclusion about the complementary nature of Wollstonecraft’s and Hays’ agendas. First, Rogers makes an unjustified assumption about authorial intention. Certainly, one must grant that, taken together, the two authors cover a range of both theoretical and practical concerns. But there is no evidence that Wollstonecraft and Hays collaborated to create, between the two of them, a farther reaching treatise than either would have produced alone. Instead, the little that is known about the life circumstances from which both authors wrote the works in question suggests that they set out, independently and simultaneously, to perform roughly the same task and yet produced two books that differ greatly in their style. Perhaps a more useful question than whether the works are complementary is whether they are compatible. That is, are the ideals and goals Wollstonecraft and Hays promote sufficiently harmonious to allow both agendas to be pursued without infringing on one another?

I posit that their agendas are not as compatible as Rogers suggests, as an application of current rhetorical notions of style will show. However, I would like to address two possible objections to this methodological approach to

reading centuries-old texts. First is the charge of anachronism. It is reasonable to wonder about the fairness of retroactively projecting today's stress on style backward to the end of the eighteenth century. New literary theories frequently inspire wildly divergent readings of venerated texts. A new theory is likely to do this insofar as the assumptions on which it is based are accepted as valid within pertinent discourse communities. It is on this basis that feminist critics offer radically different readings of literary texts that have been commented upon for millennia. Their readings are based in part on the premise that women have consistently been slandered and objectified in literature and have also been largely excluded from literary production and criticism. Therefore, literary texts produced and read in any culture where these assumptions hold true ought to be reconsidered, no matter how old or reverently canonized. Hélène Cixous' 1976 treatise "The Laugh of the Medusa," derives much of its force from its delineating and decrying of the various ideological biases that have undergirded the repression and exclusion of women. Not surprisingly, this leads Cixous to a consideration of how women are taught to write. She admonishes women to find their own way of writing that frees itself from the confining binaries and prejudices of the male dominated literary establishment. "Woman must write woman," she demands (Cixous, 1976, p. 877). Cixous' historical generalizations about the treatment of women have become widely accepted in many academic discourse communities, and interpretations based on this framework have likewise grown in acceptance. In fact, in 2008, Oxford University Press published an anthology of feminist re-interpretations of Greek myths appropriately titled *Laughing with the Medusa*.

Thus, the argument about the applicability of a modern notion of style should turn on the validity of its underlying premises. The foundational premise in view here is that experienced writers skillfully affect their message through their rhetorical techniques. Their style and their meaning are too closely related to be considered separately. This view is discussed by rhetorician Louis T. Milic in his 1965 article "Theories of Style and Their Implications for the Teaching of Composition." Milic's only caveat about aesthetic monism is its tendency to problematize pedagogy for beginning writers. They may need help, he cautions, in coming to grasp the range of choices available to them for conveying nuances of meaning. But the two masterful writers whose persuasive prose this chapter treats certainly do not fall into this category. Their style is inseparable from their meaning.

The second objection is most likely to arise from critics familiar with Milic's theory of style. Milic's 1965 essay is by no means a manifesto in favor of aesthetic monism. In fact, it sounds almost like the opposite. Writing at a time when composition teachers in American higher education were considering major changes to the Aristotelian approach to teaching rhetoric, Milic feared

that compositionists would blindly adopt “organic” theories of writing which essentially claimed that students should write whatever they feel, and that all expressions of feeling were inherently meaningful. Milic warned that this view of writing, called aesthetic monism, would render teachers helpless to their students. Novice writers, Milic argues, will be the first to claim they need help expressing what they feel, and compositionists must not hesitate to introduce them to techniques from classical rhetoric that have aided writers and speakers for millennia. But regarding the analysis of literary texts, Milic makes a key concession. He sees the need for a theory that can account for the effect of the author’s subconscious on his or her art and yet also assumes the author’s choice of style was deliberate (Milic, 1965, p. 20). That is, Milic grants that the work of mature authors should indeed be regarded as the skillfully rendered expression of what they feel, and thus meaningful in every aspect. If even this most vociferous opponent of aesthetic monism admits its place in literary analysis, then the case for using it in this fashion becomes quite compelling.

Not only does Milic function as an important if unintentional advocate for aesthetic monism, he also provides a useful definition of style. He describes style as, “the relationship of the thing to idea and idea to word [which] is left unexpressed” (Milic, 1965, p. 17). In other words, style is the holistic communicative value of a literary text arising from the interrelation of what is said, how it is said, and what is not said. Authors announce their content, but they enact their style. Milic therefore offers a key insight by describing style as a thing/idea/word relationship *that is left unsaid*. This view of style opens the possibility that the most important component of a work may be the attitude the author displays toward the audience or toward the subject matter. Reading any text, but especially a rhetorically charged text, with Milic’s definition of style in mind, reveals aspects of embedded ideology that, paradoxically, may go unnoticed when one is reading a text primarily to discern its ideology. This view of style also suggests that methodologies for reading and writing pedagogy can converge with beneficial results; Milic’s particular argument shifts from a question of student’s frustrations with college writing assignments to ruminations about their stylistic sensitivity as readers. The following style-centered reading and analysis is intended to exemplify such a convergence.

## II. A STYLE-CENTERED READING OF WOLLSTONECRAFT AND HAYS

With the case for aesthetic monism articulated and its view of style defined, I would like next to look at the stylistic features of *Vindication* and *Appeal*,

particularly the ways in which differences in style may suggest differences in meaning. Rogers began efforts along this vein in her discussion of what she calls tone. She notes, as a matter of course, the differences in tone between both authors but sees them merely as such (Rogers, 1987, p. 138). Since it is outside the scope of this project to offer a stylistic analysis of both book-length texts in their entirety, this essay will focus on passages from both that exhibit great similarities in their announced content.

Chapter 2 of *Vindication*, entitled “The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed,” and Chapter 5 of *Appeal*, entitled “What Women Are,” stand out as particularly apt passages for this type of comparison. Both chapters describe women in eighteenth-century England as caught in a vicious cycle. Women are acculturated to be childish—to feel rather than to reason—and thus furnish proponents of status quo patriarchy with examples of the unfitness of women to govern themselves or advance in society. Both chapters argue that this cycle can and must be broken by offering women access to education. Finally, both chapters outline specific ways that all of society would benefit from women’s education. (One of the later chapters of *Vindication* even includes remarkably detailed plans for how coeducational schools should operate.) Wollstonecraft and Hays shift the frame of reference for the debate about women’s education from the supposed intellectual ineptitude of women to the actual oppression of the patriarchy. Thus, the passages I will discuss are remarkably similar in the logical trajectory of their argument.

Stylistically, though, the excerpts differ greatly. For example, each author takes a very different tone when employing arguments based on historical precedent. Wollstonecraft immerses herself in the debates about the nature of women that had passed among English and Continental philosophers in the two centuries leading up to her time, including the contributions of Bacon, Milton, and Rousseau. The history that concerns her is the relatively recent history of western thought about women’s nature and role in society. She wants to address the “many ingenious arguments [that] have been brought forward to prove, that the two sexes, in the acquirement of virtue, ought to aim at attaining a very different character” (1974, p. 39). That is, she wants to counter the arguments that were used to bar women from education. Virtue, in the context of Wollstonecraft’s Enlightenment-laden lexicon, means something very much like agency or self-actuation and is thus linked to the attainment of education.

Having stated her main premise, Wollstonecraft frames the argument around a sharp conjecture: “If then women are not a swarm of ephemeron triflers, why should they be kept in ignorance [of the means of attaining virtue] under the specious name of innocence?” (Wollstonecraft, 1974, p. 39). She next reviews a number of passages from the aforementioned writers who her audience would

likely have held in high regard. She focuses especially Milton's *Paradise Lost*. She challenges the representation of Eve as subservient by design and sees Milton as having inadvertently helped her case. Milton certainly stresses the eternity and spirituality of women in his rendering of the creation of Eve (Wollstonecraft, 1974, pp. 41-42). Milton's ontological view of women, then, suggests that they stand equally ready with their male counterparts for education, or "the betterment of one's soul," as it was often described in Enlightenment discourse.

In its announced content, Wollstonecraft's passage simply calls for women to be allowed access to education. However, the dexterous, erudite, polemic style in which this passage is written accomplishes much more than this. Wollstonecraft's style serves as her credentials to enter this discussion as an Enlightenment intellectual. It puts her opponents on notice that she has raided their rhetorical arsenal. Her style is thus one of the most important evidences she can offer for her case that women can benefit from education as much as men. Her style displays her acumen; it issues a challenge; it demands an answer. She could have chosen any topic as the announced content of this discourse, and written in this style, it would still pose the same challenge to educated men who want to exclude women from their ranks.

In stark contrast to Wollstonecraft's sophisticated style is the straightforwardness of Mary Hays' persuasive prose. Here is a passage that offers a wide-sweeping historiography of the detrimental effects of a civilization denying education to a large portion of its society:

We have for examples of this, only to contemplate the characters and conduct of the descendents of Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, and other nations, living under the same climates, and upon the very same soil, where their renowned ancestors flourished in arts, and triumphed in arms; and to consider to what a state of degradation and humiliation they are now reduced! (Hays, 1974, pp. 69-70)

The social and historical essentializing found in this passage undermines its validity as an argument based on historical precedent. Can any cogent, pertinent analogies be drawn between the role that education (and exclusion from it) played in the classical cultures Hays lists and the role it played in Enlightenment England?

So if the argument Hays forwards here is to succeed, it must do so more on the basis of style than content, a style characterized by enthusiasm and earnestness. Not only is the exclamation mark a clue to the high emotional pitch of this prose, but the extended list of adverbial clauses that modifies



“living” gives the sentence a hymn-like rhythm. Furthermore, it is a relatively long sentence but a short paragraph. This is typical of Hays’ style throughout the *Appeal*. By comparison, Wollstonecraft’s sentences are longer, more complex, and grouped into paragraphs whose relationship to one another plays a greater role in advancing the linear progress of her argument. And, as noted, this sentence’s length is a function of the adverbial clauses. This is among the most ideologically simple ways to achieve long sentences. In academic prose, sentence length usually proliferates because of long noun clauses in the subject position and the frequent use of other forms of subordinate clauses to reflect complicated and contingent relationships among ideas. The communicative effect of Hays’ long but fairly simple sentences is reflected in her work’s title; she is indeed, from the stylistic perspective, making an appeal, a supplication. As Rogers notes, the hallmark of Hays’ stylistic strategy is repetition. Rogers sees Hays as tapping into “the persuasive power of earnestness and gravity” (1987, p. 134). Whereas Wollstonecraft bursts into the conversation on her own intellectual merits, Hays politely but persistently knocks on the door.

From these two passages, then, one can see that even when Wollstonecraft and Hays address similar topics, their styles achieve different communicative effects. Already this suggests a significant difference in their respective agendas for women’s rights. The question of how an underrepresented group can gain an audience is sometimes the most important issue it faces. The agendas of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, for example, differed sharply enough on this point to prevent their working together toward common goals, since the latter condoned violence under certain circumstances as a means of garnering attention.

I propose that there are also differences in the content of the agendas proposed by Wollstonecraft and Hays. They may be considerably less compatible than is commonly thought. For example, the following excerpt from Hays reveals, both in its content and delivery, demure attitude toward oppression hardly imaginable in Wollstonecraft:

Women therefore, generally speaking, act a wiser and a better part as individuals, to keep within that boundary prescribed by their lawgivers. Within it they often contrive to do mischief enough; without it who can pretend to say where the mischief might end? For, candidly speaking, perhaps it would be dangerous to trust women all at once, with liberty in that extent which is their due.

But it is to be regretted, that the temperance and good sense



shewn by women, in submitting with so good a grace to injuries, which though they cannot redress, they nevertheless feel very severely; it is much to be regretted, that this temperance and good sense, is not attended with better consequences to themselves. (1974, p. 71)

Here is incontrovertible evidence of Hays' gradualism; how would this ever have operated smoothly alongside her mentor's revolutionary ardor? It is outside the scope of this project to explore this and all other possible divergences in agenda between Hays and her mentor, eminently useful as such an undertaking would be. Instead, I wish to emphasize what the style of the proceeding passage says about Hays' approach to alleviating women's suffering. The style of this passage demonstrates Hays' unwavering resolve to remain civil at all times. In light of the panoramic extent of the "injuries" Hays must have in mind, it is very telling that she understatedly laments that this suffering "is much to be regretted" (1974, p. 71). If there were ever a time that merited an unrestrained outburst, this qualifies. Hays' choice to maintain her suppliant, long-suffering tone even under these circumstances suggests that her commitment to civility tops of her list of ideological priorities.

Wollstonecraft's tone, by contrast, is the stylistic equivalent of a call to storm the Bastille. In response to Rousseau's assumption that, "with respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought to be impressed with unrelenting rigor," she exclaims, "What nonsense! When will a great man arise with sufficient strength of mind to puff away the fumes which pride and sensuality have thus spread over the subject!" (1974, pp. 50-1). This is an *ad hominem* attack in the most literal, gendered sense of the term—an attack against man. Wollstonecraft accuses her opponents of hubris, not merely faulty logic. But the strategy works. It succeeds in part because the erudition of her style has earned her the right to take an occasional jab at her opponents. Furthermore, she follows this attack with a reiteration of her watertight postulation that if men insist on defining the quest for virtue as a natural outworking of human nature, they must include all humans in this quest.

This comparison of their style shows that Wollstonecraft and Hays differ in agenda because they differ so greatly in their relationship to their chosen audiences. Wollstonecraft, of course, addressed *Vindication* primarily to Talleyrand in the hopes that the French Revolution would result in advances in the wellbeing of France's women in general and their access to education in particular. Her choice to write in a high register of English, though, suggests that Great Britain's educated elite is her primary audience, and these she feels comfortable addressing as her equals. Rogers suspects that Hays' style is an

adaptation of the women's conduct literature with which the middle class would have been familiar (1987, p. 135). This is an interesting choice on Hays' part, given that her invoked audience is specifically the men of Great Britain. The value of applying the perspectives of aesthetic monism to these texts is that it allows an author's choice of agenda, choice of audience, and choice of style to be seen as different facets of the same choice. The author decides who has the power to positively modify the problem at hand and also how to present himself or herself to that audience. Wollstonecraft and Hays differ in style in part because they differ in their conviction of which segment of England's population should take up the feminist cause. Style is never merely style.

This perspective has numerous implications for the college writing classroom, two of which I would like to delineate in the interest of incorporating style more effectively into curriculum. First, the means through which conclusions were drawn about the role of style in Wollstonecraft's and Hays' writing may evidence why discussions of style can seem inaccessible, even esoteric to students. If stylistic analysis typically utilizes, as it has here, historical context, literary context, reader response criticism, audience analysis, rhetorical theory, and grammatical scrutiny, then students can hardly be blamed for not knowing what instructors have in mind when referring to style. If style truly arises from all these factors, it is a more advanced concept than typically billed. To teach style as a mere adjunct to the rudiments of grammar (as is often the case in middle school) is therefore a curricular miscalibration. To teach style as a component of audience awareness (common at the collegiate level) comes closer to the mark, but still under-represents its complexity and value.

Related to this issue of miscalibration is a question of curricular sequencing, and it can be explained by making use of Benjamin S. Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. As writing teachers, we tend to feel most assured that students are advancing in their understanding of style when we see its techniques used with creativity and dexterity in their own writing. A cursory reference to Bloom's taxonomy would seem to confirm this; to employ style in one's own writing is to create, and creation is a part of synthesis, the second highest form of learning. But a closer look at the taxonomy prompts two further questions: Can the student explain her or his success? Can the student reproduce success in a variety of topics and genres, and in relation to diverse audiences?

Explaining one's own success requires a panoply of specialized vocabulary, since style draws upon many facets of literary and linguistic analysis. Bloom contends that possessing specialized vocabulary is a basic, foundational form of learning; he groups it with "knowledge" at the bottom of his taxonomy. The rationale for doing so, articulated in the following quote, seems directly applicable to the question of how stylistic aptitude should be taught and

assessed. Perhaps Bloom's own style—his nearly belligerent use of repetition—indicates a suspicion that educators will not initially share his emphasis on the foundational importance of vocabulary:

Each field contains a large number of symbols, either verbal or non-verbal, which have particular referents. These represent the basic language of the field—the shorthand used by workers in a field to express what they know. In any attempt by workers to communicate with others about phenomena within the field, they find it necessary to make use of some of the special symbols and terms they have devised. In many cases it is impossible for them to discuss problems in their field without making use of some of the essential terms of that field. Quite literally, they are unable to think about many of the phenomena in the field unless they make use of these terms and symbols. (1956, p. 64)

If Bloom's sweeping generalizations seem reliable, then students need to be supplied a vocabulary of style as early as possible. This vocabulary could eventually provide students with a framework that helps them to evaluate (Bloom's highest form of learning) a variety of rhetorical situations and make appropriate stylistic choices. In contemporary pedagogical terms, this would be the level of development at which transference could reasonably be expected. Even if Bloom's taxonomy is not taken as precisely reflective of a writer's development, we may still do well to accept the premise that the accumulation of vocabulary precedes (and provides) the ability to assess sophisticated challenges and consistently reproduce results.

### III. WRITING STYLE, IDENTITY, AND ETHOS

Students may not feel particular enthusiasm for memorizing lists of Greek and Latin vocabulary, but there may be a way to utilize their affective development to foster cognitive development. Curriculum that highlights connections between writing style and a sense of identity can show students that they already have a vested interest in this topic by raising concerns they are likely to have considered previously in history and social studies classes and in their own interpersonal experiences. Wollstonecraft and Hays elaborate on the relationship between their choice of writing style and notions of gender in their society in ways today's audiences are likely to find interesting, even estranging.

Consequently, they are useful for helping scholars and students see the recursive connection between identity and style as both enduring and current.

Wollstonecraft lays out what she sees as the connection between style and conceptions of gender in the introduction of *Vindication*, and she announces her plan to trample these notions:

I shall disdain to cull my phrases or polish my style;—I aim at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; for, wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments, than dazzle by the elegance of my language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, or in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings, which, coming from the head, never reach the heart. I shall be employed about things, not words!—and, anxious to render my sex more respectable members of society, I shall try to avoid that flowery diction which has slid from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversation. (1974, p. 23)

So for Wollstonecraft, much is at stake in style. She posits herself as a spokeswoman for all women (at least in Great Britain), and the respectability of their collective reputation will rise or fall based on her ability to eschew fancy talk for substantive ideas. Language practices in general are at stake, too, in her view. She believes essays set the standard that should be emulated by authors of other genres and then by casual speakers; therefore, the style of her essay is a question of national importance.

Wollstonecraft can be forgiven for overestimating the immediate social impact of the style of her essay, but she did not underestimate the extent to which her society viewed writing style as inherently gendered. In her 1996 essay “The Vindication of the Writes of Women: Mary Wollstonecraft and Enlightenment Rhetoric” Miriam Brody documents the pedagogical influences Wollstonecraft would both appropriate and react against in crafting *Vindication*. First, Brody notes that the gendered notions of style that pervaded Enlightenment rhetoric have their roots in classical rhetoric. Ancient rhetoricians beginning with Aristotle described good writing in exclusively male terms, praising its force and productivity as its highest merits, Brody contends. Their metaphors were also gender-laden, such as a builder making effective use of his tools and as a legislator making good use of his wisdom. Brody puts special emphasis, though, on the contributions Quintilian made to this notion. He made explicit the correlation of good persuasive prose and natural masculinity in an extended metaphor that describes ornamented, affected language as a well dressed eunuch.

He contrasted this with plain language, which he likened to the attractiveness, strength and productivity of a virile man (1996, pp. 107-108).

Brody contends that these gendered notions of rhetoric prevailed for centuries, and most importantly for Wollstonecraft, they influenced the Enlightenment thinkers under whom she studied. Thus, Wollstonecraft faced not only the challenge of being a woman writer at a time when very few were published, but in *Vindication* she participates in the most “masculine” category of discourse: persuasive prose intended for the public arena.

Brody sees Wollstonecraft as having met this challenge in three ways. First, Wollstonecraft not only adopts but draws attention to her forthright style, as seen in the previously quoted excerpt from the introduction of *Vindication*. Second, she joined with her rhetorical predecessors in the condemnation of affected femininity. She mitigates this attack, however, by focusing it particularly on the habits and attitudes of upper class women. In Brody’s view, this distinction paves the way for Wollstonecraft’s third technique, that is, the description of the healthy, effective, unaffected woman who matches men in their ability to wield the “masculine” traits of persuasive language. This new category or “genus,” into which she implicitly places herself, she calls “the exceptional woman” (Brody, 1996, pp. 112-113). To Brody’s analysis, I would add that Wollstonecraft uses style to distance herself from women in general and to align herself more closely with the men with whom she seeks an audience. She saw style as central to gender, and she chose to adopt a socially solitary role for the sake of her rhetorical mission.

Hays does not theorize about her style, but she does apologize for it. Worried that her style, so conciliatory by comparison to Wollstonecraft’s, will distance her from men, she explains:

I have heretofore, it is true, been pretty free in my observations upon the conduct of men, where I think it absurd and capricious with regard to women; but I hope without acrimony, for I am sure I feel none towards them. On the contrary I love them with all my heart as individuals. (1974, p. 93)

It is possible to see the effects of gender and style operating in quite the opposite ways here as in Wollstonecraft’s text. The assumption that women must be peacemakers (presumably at any cost) underlies the preceding excerpt, as does the assumption that women must avoid even the appearance of acrimony. Women are embodiments of pure love, in Hays’ view, and this must be reflected in their writing style. Many of the rhetorical techniques Wollstonecraft employs become necessarily off limits in this view. The sarcastic pronouncement of

acquiescence, the bombastic rebuttal, and certainly the *ad hominem* attack do not fit within Hays' construct of femininity.

Although contemporary feminist rhetoricians would have much to say about this patriarchal construction of womanhood, they too question the ethics inherent in classical rhetoric. In her 1979 article "The Womanization of Rhetoric," Sally Miller Gerhart goes as far as to claim that "any intent to persuade is an act of violence" (1979, p. 195). She lists several tendencies within the classical rhetorical tradition, many of which persist to the present day, that she sees as inherently patriarchal and destructive. These include a proclivity for conquest and competition, a disregard for the feelings and opinions of others, and the assumption that one should value victory as a higher good than personal growth and change. While Gerhart's equating persuasion with violence never caught on—perhaps it was recognized as an attempt at persuasion—her critique of the inherently patriarchal nature of Western rhetoric sparked a discussion that continues to this day. Especially prominent in this conversation are Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin. Wanting to explore further the notion that rhetors should embrace a willingness to grow and change as a result of argumentation, they developed a framework called invitational rhetoric. Their 1995 article "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for Invitational Rhetoric" includes recommendations for maximizing the personal developmental potential inherent in exchanging the classical, conflict-oriented model of rhetoric for a model that is "rooted in equality, immanent value and self-determination" (1995, p. 5). Invitational rhetoric has immediate implications for style. It necessarily favors conciliatory word choices over inflammatory ones, for example. The use of a rhetorical question meant to force an opponent to abandon his or her position, a stalwart of classical rhetoric, has no place in the invitational approach.

Wollstonecraft and Hays, then, fare very differently in an assessment of the extent to which they embody the values of invitational rhetoric. With Wollstonecraft, we arrive at an ethical impasse. Many of the stylistic techniques invitational rhetoric eschews as hegemonic are commonplace in Wollstonecraft's repertoire. But ironically, she adopted and co-opted these techniques from classical and Enlightenment rhetoric on ethical grounds of her own, namely, because they were the right tools to accomplish a worthy task that she was in an exceptional position to undertake. If Wollstonecraft has a methodological advocate among contemporary feminist rhetoricians, it may be Cixous, who claims that women should consider themselves free to take anything that works from the male-dominated world of writing and use it in their own way: "We've been able to possess anything only by flying; [in French, "to fly" has the double meaning "to steal"] we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers" (Cixous, 1976, p. 887). Writing two

centuries after Wollstonecraft, Cixous likewise collapses the question of ethics into one of pragmatic necessity for the advancement of women. But Hays, from the standpoint of invitational rhetoric, generally exhibits the conciliatory tone that accords with a concern for the feelings of all participants in a debate. She could be said to anticipate and embody this aspect of invitational rhetoric. The premium she places on civility as exemplified in her ever hopeful, never spiteful tone, also seems to accord with these principles.

By overtly commenting on the rhetorical aims of their stylistic choices, both authors highlight the functioning of the “economies of attention” William Kurlinkus describes in this volume. Hays and Wollstonecraft both employ style in an attempt to “get the audience to pay the right kind of attention.” The ethical components of “economies of attention” Kurlinkus outlines can readily be demonstrated to college-level writing students. Even without exposure to classical or contemporary rhetorical theory, they can appreciate the conundrums these feminist authors faced as they sought the best styles to suit their purposes. Certainly, students can describe instances of feeling that they had to alter or fabricate a sense of self for the sake of a writing assignment. Even in an age when educators seek to root prejudice out of language instruction, we cannot help sending inadvertent messages about which dialects, preferences, and attitudes are most welcome on the page. It is important to acknowledge, then, the ethical advancement inherent in supplying students the agency to shape their own written identities.

#### **IV. THE TRANSITION FROM A STYLE-CENTERED READING METHODOLOGY TO A STYLE-CENTERED WRITING PEDAGOGY**

Rhetoricians and experienced writers will likely recognize the implications for writing of this style-based reading methodology. Many may find in it echoes of their own experiences when immersion in a body of literature helped them find their voice(s) on the page. But college students, especially first and second year students in mandatory composition courses, will need a manageable process by which a guided reading experience can equip them to be style-conscious authors. The following heuristic therefore seeks to encapsulate this article’s methodology into four sequenced steps that can be applied to a wide range of artifacts in a writing classroom.

In terms of preparation, the first two questions entail choosing an old document whose stylistic features students will analyze. The instructor’s choice should be calibrated around the student’s linguistic dexterity; the sample



document should be old enough to seem entirely removed from the student's place and time, but not so old that the vocabulary and syntax significantly obscure comprehension. Next, the instructor should be ready to offer an historical overview of the artifacts' circumstances of origin.

## **1. WHAT IS THE CULTURAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT OF THIS DOCUMENT?**

Writing instruction about the persuasive prose of Mary Wollstonecraft should probably begin with guided readings in Edmund Burke. As his speeches are less intricate (by Burkean standards) than his essays, and since they take greater care to explain their purpose and occasion, they provide an entry point for helping students understand the social shifts and tensions of late eighteenth century Great Britain. It would also show students the stylistic standard Wollstonecraft adopted and then determined to exceed. When studying the persuasive prose of Mary Hays, the obvious starting point is the conduct literature that proliferated during her day and that established the style Hays would emulate.

For first and second year students, I recommend choosing a document from within approximately the past fifty years. The dearth of history instruction generally in secondary education and the specifically rare use of primary documents effectively preclude the possibility that any landmark essay will be too familiar to play its role in this heuristic. In teaching Martin Luther King Jr.'s "A Letter from the Birmingham Jail" at the university level, I have found that a basic review of the challenges faced by the Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s is necessary. In any instance, the historical overview should eventually focus on a discussion of the rhetorical situation that immediately surrounds the document.

## **2. HOW SHOULD THE AUTHOR'S STYLISTIC CHOICES BE SEEN IN LIGHT OF THE HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT?**

I have found that students' appreciation of King as an author and rhetor elevates dramatically when they compare his letter to the pedantic style of "A Call for Unity," the open letter from Alabama clergymen that prompted his response. Without this comparison, and without considering King's letter as having been written in jail, my students have sometimes perfunctorily described its style as "sophisticated" and "well-read." With the comparison intact, students are more frequently able to explain the role King's style plays in countering the argument presented by the Alabama clergymen. Likewise, if students are to appreciate Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," they may need exposure to two or three samples of the writings of social activists from that time. When the

text is considered in isolation, Swift's condemnation of the English landholding class is overwhelmingly clear. Only when seen in its literary context is it clear that Swift's clinical, detached tone is a mockery of Enlightened social activists who, in his view, had become numb to the human suffering they intended to solve. This exemplifies the sort of significant but unstated meaning Milic encourages literary scholars to discover through attentiveness to style, and it is within the reach of beginning composition students.

The use of an old document as the examined artifact offers several unique advantages. First, it reduces the cognitive dissonance students feel when reading about contemporary controversial topics. They do not have to work to clarify or re-categorize their own position about the causes of starvation in eighteenth century Ireland before examining Swift's stylistic choices. Similarly unlikely is the prospect that Wollstonecraft's and Hays' call for women's education would seem like anything other than a foregone conclusion. Comparing the styles of old documents also counteracts the myth, often fostered inadvertently through curricular omission, that style does not matter. Students will see that through style, authors have been able to demonstrate credentials or assert membership in a group to which their society denied them access. They will internalize the ancient sense of "ethos" as the confluence of one's sense of self, character on the page, and ethical standards. Finally, the use of old documents will challenge the myth that style simply happens. Even when reading authors who claim to "write the way they feel," students will be able to draw meaningful conclusions about why an author's feelings were expressed in that manner at that point in history. In the course of performing the first two steps, students will have assembled a glossary of rhetorical techniques, or at least augmented their vocabulary of style. It is advantageous for beginning students to hand-craft their own glossaries, annotating them with examples.

### **3. HOW SHOULD AN AUTHOR'S STYLISTIC CHOICES BE UNDERSTOOD IN TODAY'S CULTURAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT?**

The third step of this heuristic is intended to help students transfer their stylistic awareness into the present day. Their glossaries become tools for examining a variety of current samples of persuasive prose including op-ed pieces, political speeches, and advertisements. It is common for courses in persuasive writing to require at least one assignment based on a rhetorical analysis of a document or artifact. Such an assignment could easily be altered to ask students to focus only on the style of the artifact and to analyze its rhetorical impact.

The sequencing of this step is also intended to help students put today's conflicts in their historical contexts since their discoveries about stylistic

continuities or departures can lead to discoveries about ideological ones. It also hoped that the previous two steps will have offered students means to grapple with and more adequately express their cognitive dissonance. Well-articulated cognitive dissonance is the basis, or at least the starting point, of effective persuasive prose. This step in the heuristic can increase the chance that students will find themselves productively invested in current affairs instead of responding to cognitive dissonance with despondency and vapid writing.

#### **4. HOW WILL MY STYLISTIC CHOICES BE UNDERSTOOD IN TODAY'S CULTURAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT?**

The culminating process of transference is that students would apply their stylistic awareness to their own writing in relation to a contemporary audience. Obviously, this can be done with a completed text through a style-oriented workshop. But it can also be fruitfully applied to an essay in its early drafting stages. Writing instructors, myself included, typically prompt students to plan the main points of an essay before attempting to generate a complete text. Yet in doing so, we may be subverting deeply ingrained cognitive and creative processes; upon reflection, it seems that in many rhetorical situations, locutors crystallize their stylistic decisions before refining their content. Do we not enter most verbal arguments with a fuller sense of how we feel (and thus our tone) than of exactly what we will say? In the process of crafting written arguments, then, students should be prompted early on to inventory their feelings about their topic and to strategize about ways to channel their feelings into effective stylistic decisions.

Although this iteration of the heuristic is calibrated for first and second year students, it can be adapted for application at various levels of university writing instruction. In an intermediate class in persuasive writing, it could be used to turn a favorite paper from the semester into a capstone project by refining its sense of audience and ethos. In advanced and graduate courses, this heuristic can be introduced early in the semester as a tool to guide the drafting process. I also recommend adapting the level of transparency in one's pedagogy to the students' maturity as writers. Beginning writers may only be able to see in retrospect what they have gained through these guided reading activities, and they may be initially distrustful that discussions of historical conflicts and literary techniques will aid their present efforts. Graduate students, though, should appreciate the opportunity to refine their methodologies and increase awareness of their own metacognition. Finally, this heuristic accommodates adjustment in terms of its scope. It can be used relatively quickly to illuminate students' understanding of one document, or it could be the framework on which scholars conduct a

corpus analysis that seeks to catalogue and contextualize the stylistic decisions in an entire body of literature, such as the essays and pamphlets of the American Revolution.

This project aspires to integrate formerly disparate pedagogical approaches. Whereas Milic himself postulated that a different approach to style may be needed for literary analysis and for writing instruction, a large degree of harmony and transference seems possible. The application of the combined reading and writing methodology presented here can help writers mature as they become more eclectic, interdisciplinary, and holistic in their experience of language. Integration—an indispensable step in development—can also help student writers more clearly see their agency as individuals who can contribute to the discourses that shape society.

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